

Senate CIA watcher now the watched

By Nicholas M. Horrock

Chicago Tribune

WASHINGTON—On the surface, it is not an unusual story here. A handsome United States senator, driven by the demands of a successful political career and entangled in an extramarital love affair, suddenly finds his marriage and family disintegrating.

But what is happening to Sen. David Durenberger [R., Minn.] has gone beyond that not-so-uncommon outgrowth of the strains of political power and success.

Among his senatorial duties, Durenberger is the chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, which has the "oversight" of the entire U.S. intelligence apparatus.

He is one of the most important figures in American intelligence outside of the director of the Central Intelligence Agency, William Casey. Durenberger has the power to delve into the nation's deepest national security secrets, from details of how international electronic eavesdropping works to information about America's spies in Moscow.

Despite the fact that he is a senior Republican, Durenberger has opposed the President and Casey on certain aspects of the covert aid to anticommunist guerrillas fighting in Nicaragua, Angola and Afghanistan.

Now his personal difficulties seem to be caught up in the increasingly bitter battles over President Reagan's accelerated use of covert action around the world. The senator has found himself the subject of attacks, both overt and covert, which suggest that strains of his personal life might make him a poor risk for such a sensitive national security role.

Some of the tactics have a strong whiff of early days of the Cold War, when an unpopular political view or association could call in question a government official's loyalty or suitability for a security clearance.

After three extensive news interviews about his personal problems over the last eight months, Durenberger has stopped answering questions on the subject. Now when asked whether his personal difficulties affect his national security responsibilities, he issues a one-word response: "No."

But the details of the Durenberger case provide insight into the covert action debate and the difficulties of congressional oversight of the intelligence activities of an administration that has increased

foreign operations tenfold since 1981.

After five years of service on the intelligence committee, Durenberger became chairman in January, 1985, replacing Sen. Barry Goldwater [R., Ariz.], a strong supporter of much of the administration's intelligence policy.

Early interviews with the news media revealed that Durenberger wanted more openness on intelligence issues and he suggested that the thinly disguised support for the contras fighting in Nicaragua might be more valuable delivered openly.

At almost the same time, two close associates of the senator now acknowledge, he was trying to extricate himself from a love affair with a member of his secretarial staff. There had been little public comment about the relationship, though one St. Paul newspaper had reported an incident in February, 1985, in which the senator had been involved in a loud quarrel at Washington's National Airport with a woman who accused him of ruining her life.

The following month, the senator's office informed the news media in Minnesota that the Durenbergers had decided to separate after 13 years of marriage and he had moved in to a Catholic retreat residence a few miles from his handsome McLean, Va., home.

For years the Durenbergers had been a family well known beyond Minnesota's political circles. His wife Penny was the widow of a Marine Corps captain who died in Vietnam in 1969 and who had worked on the staff and in campaigns of the late Sen. Hubert Humphrey.

The couple were married in 1971. Durenberger's first wife had died in 1970 of cancer and left him with four small sons. Few dispute that Penny raised the four boys while Durenberger built a political career that landed him a Senate seat in 1978.

Unlike many Senate families, the Durenbergers had modest means, and the senator has supplemented his government salary with a heavy schedule of speeches around the country. This travel and regular trips to his home state were coupled with what one political associate called "an almost obsessive work schedule."

News anecdotes about his wife depict her trying to cope with the opulent social life of Reagan's Washington with dresses off the rack and the responsibilities of a full-time wife and mother.

As 1985 progressed, two themes were developing at the same time. Durenberger's personal difficulties seemed to be attracting more attention, and his relationship with Casey and certain others in the intelligence community seemed to worsen.

Last Oct. 27, the Minneapolis Star and Tribune published a lengthy front-page story by its Washington correspondent, Steve Berg, based heavily on an extended interview with the senator. In the interview, Durenberger acknowledged the turbulence in his life. He talked of his estrangement from his wife, his concerns over the narcotic problems of one his children and his dissatisfaction at 51 with many phases of his existence.

Though he declined to discuss what the paper called "any romantic indiscretion," he had told others privately, according to two associates, that the relationship had been ended. He gave a similar interview to a St. Paul paper.

Only days after Durenberger laid out his personal difficulties, Vitaly Yurchenko, a senior officer in the Soviet intelligence service who had defected to the U.S., chose to return home. The widely publicized "redefection" suggested either CIA handlers had

mishandled their quarry or he had been a sophisticated plant by the Soviets.

The CIA had heavily touted Yurchenko's value, and there had been several news articles in the weeks before his redefection reporting that the CIA had its hands on a top-level Soviet intelligence officer who was providing valuable information on spies operating here. The loss of Yurchenko had been a devastating blow to Casey's tenure at the CIA.

In early November, after Yurchenko had left for the Soviet Union, Durenberger criticized some aspects of the CIA's handling of the matter at a lunch with news reporters. His criticism, carried in the Washington Post and later several other publications, engendered a rare open battle with Casey at the CIA.

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